

VZCZCXRO4540
OO RUEHBC RUEHBW RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHTRO
DE RUEHMO #1118/01 1131256
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 221256Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7721
INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 001118

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: RUSSIA PLEASED WITH RESULTS OF PNA LEADER ABBAS
VISIT

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an April 22 meeting, MFA Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director Ozerov positively assessed the April 16-18 visit of PNA Leader Abbas to Moscow. Abbas reviewed the latest developments in the Israeli-Palestinian and Fatah-Hamas talks, stressing that there was room for cautious optimism. Despite the obstacles, Abbas cited the clear political will in the Israeli government, strong international support for Abbas' leadership, prospects for some kind of cease-fire between the GOI and Hamas, and Fatah's more "flexible approach" to reconciliation with Hamas as the basis for his upbeat assessment. Abbas publicly and privately gave his unequivocal support for the Moscow Conference, and expressed concern over the absence of an "energetic" U.S. endorsement. Abbas agreed with Russia's approach to the conference, stressing that a "comprehensive" agenda was necessary and achievable. Abbas told Russia that Olmert would not likely accept Egypt's invitation to Sharm El Sheikh, but if he did, Abbas said he would be looking for signals from the U.S. on its support for the conference. End summary.

Abbas Cautiously Optimistic

¶2. (C) In an April 22 meeting, MFA Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director Oleg Ozerov told us that Russia was "very pleased" with PNA Leader Abbas' April 16-18 visit to Moscow. On April 17, Abbas met with Russia's Muslim spiritual leader Ravil Gainutdin, Russian Orthodox Patriarch Aleksey, gave remarks at MGIMO, and participated in several press interviews. On April 18, Abbas provided Putin and FM Lavrov with a relatively upbeat assessment of the developments on the ground, stressing that despite remaining disagreements between PM Olmert and himself, there was room for "guarded optimism."

¶3. (C) First, Abbas underscored his and Olmert's strong political will to maintain the momentum in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations initiated in Annapolis. While concerned about a perceived hardening in Israel's position, Abbas still believed that the GOI wanted him to succeed as Israel's only legitimate negotiating partner. Second, Abbas was satisfied with the strong and unwavering level of international support for his leadership, particularly from the U.S., Russia, and the Quartet. Abbas told Putin and Lavrov that he looked forward to President Bush's planned May trip to the region and was confident that the trip would translate into further support for his efforts. Finally, Abbas believed that the Hamas-Israeli negotiations mediated by Egypt were moving forward, noting that some kind of a cease-fire, even if informal and unpublicized, was on the horizon. Ozerov commented that Abbas in no way underestimated the daunting obstacles, but

GOR officials found Abbas considerably more optimistic than they expected.

Abbas' More Flexible Approach to Hamas

14. (C) When asked about Abbas' press statements indicating that he did not support greater international recognition of and engagement with Hamas, Ozerov acknowledged that Abbas pressed Russia to keep the Hamas leadership at arm's distance. However, Ozerov stressed that Abbas clearly understood Russia's position that any agreement reached by Olmert and Abbas would ultimately be undermined by the deep divide in the Palestinian camp.

15. (C) Ozerov said GOR officials were "pleasantly surprised" to hear Abbas say that there were no "insurmountable obstacles" to political reconciliation with Hamas, provided that the basis for such reconciliation was the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. Ozerov said Russia considers Abbas' "more flexible" approach to Hamas a step in the right direction and the ball was now in Hamas' court. Specifically, Hamas needed to accept the Arab Peace Initiative, in addition to agreeing to a cease-fire with Israel.

16. (C) Putin repeatedly assured the Palestinian leader that Russia's engagement with Hamas was only directed at bringing the group under Abbas' authority and the PNA umbrella. Ozerov added that former President Carter's recent meeting with the Hamas leadership underscored the importance of dealing with all stakeholders in the region.

Moscow Conference Still on Track

MOSCOW 00001118 002 OF 002

17. (C) Ozerov said Abbas made it clear that he firmly supported Russia's planned Moscow Conference, noting that Russia's active involvement in the peace process was necessary and welcome. During the joint press conference with Putin, Abbas said the conference should take place in June, "or sooner." Moreover, Abbas expressed concern publicly and privately that the U.S. has not "energetically" backed the conference. Ozerov explained that Abbas "heavily depends" on U.S. support, and without clearer signals, Abbas is forced to question the level of U.S. enthusiasm for the conference.

18. (C) Lavrov told Abbas he would seek consensus among the Quartet members during their upcoming meeting in London on the following basic elements of the conference:

-- The composition of the conference still has not been finalized, but Russia took on board the U.S. suggestion that the guest list represent a "compact" version of the Annapolis guest list. That is, Hamas, and other "generally unrecognized groups and actors" will not be invited.

-- Russia acknowledges Israeli concerns about detailed discussions of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, but Israel should not be opposed to a cursory discussion on the progress achieved since Annapolis. Similarly, Russia is also confident that a solution can be found to allay GOI concerns about being subjected to criticism by the international community. Ozerov said Abbas agreed that Israel's position on these two points were not entrenched.

-- Russia insists that the agenda for the conference should reflect the "package" of MEPP issues, including the Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Syrian, Israeli-Lebanese, and multilateral tracks. Ozerov said Russia could not understand "Israeli wavering" on Syria's participation in the conference and the resumption of Israeli-Syrian discussions, noting that various aspects of this track were discussed in Annapolis. While acknowledging Arab countries' continued reluctance to

engage on the multilateral track, Ozerov said Russia will try to repackage the idea as a discussion on "regional cooperation" in an effort to satisfy Israeli demands for the conference.

¶9. (C) Abbas said he supported Russia's vision for the conference and believed Israel would eventually come around to a more "comprehensive" agenda.

Russia Questions Timing of Sharm El Sheikh Conference

¶10. (C) In response to Lavrov's question about the timing of Egypt's recently proposed conference in Sharm El Sheikh, Abbas said he understood Olmert was not "ready" to attend the Egyptian conference and thus doubted that the conference would materialize. However, if Olmert decided to attend, Ozerov stressed that Abbas -- as well as Russia -- would look for the U.S. reaction to the Egyptian conference and for any perceived shift in the U.S. position on the Moscow conference. Lavrov told Abbas that Russia would not oppose the Egyptian conference, as long as there was no attempt to marginalize Russian diplomatic efforts.

Abbas Grateful for Russian Aid

¶11. (C) Abbas expressed his gratitude for Russian financial and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian territories. Putin acknowledged that the recent decision to disburse \$10 million to the PNA coffers and provide the Palestinian forces with 25 armored personnel carriers was not a "sizable" aid package, but it underlined Russia's "political support" for Abbas. The humanitarian aid package to Gaza was only aimed to relieve some of the suffering, although Ozerov noted that the GOI blockade has complicated the delivery of the aid.

BURNS